Cooking with Warm Season Herbs

Using fresh herbs in your cooking is a great way to add flavor to foods while reducing the use of salt. Many herbs also contain antioxidants so can improve the nutritional quality of the meal.

Fresh herbs are readily available at most markets or you can choose to grow your own. Many are easy to grow in the ground or containers. The University of Florida/IFAS Extension publication, Herbs in the Florida Garden, provides details on choosing and growing herbs. The publication is available on-line at [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh020](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/vh020)

Florida summers are challenging for growing herbs. Many do not survive the heat and humidity and some survive but do not thrive. No matter what herbs you grow, there are many ways to use them to add flavor to any course of your meals. They add a fresh flavor that you don’t get with the dried variety and are fun to experiment with!

### Most Likely to Survive Florida Summers

- Basil
- Chives
- Garlic chives
- Lemongrass
- Mint (some varieties)
- Oregano
- Rosemary
- Sage
- Mexican tarragon

### May Survive the Summer Heat

- Catnip
- Lavender
- Lemon balm
- Parsley
- Rue
- Savory
- Thyme

### Cooking with Herbs Basics

There a few general guidelines to follow when cooking with fresh herbs:

- Approximate equivalent amounts of different forms of herbs are:
  - 1 tablespoon finely cut fresh herbs = 1 teaspoon crumbled dried herbs = ¼ to ½ teaspoon ground dried herbs
- When doubling recipe, don’t double herbs. Start with 1½ times the amount. Then add as needed.
- Purchase or pick near time of use, preferably in the morning. Wash when ready to use.
- To preserve flavor, add near the end of cooking
  - Add delicate herbs a minute or two before end (basil, chives, cilantro, parsley, mint)
  - Less delicate, add about last 20 minutes. (oregano, rosemary, tarragon, thyme)
Quick-Roasted Cherry Tomato Sauce with Spaghetti

4 quarts water  3½ tsp. salt
2 tsp. salt  ⅛ tsp. crushed red pepper
8 ounces uncooked spaghetti  2⅓ cups cherry tomatoes
2⅔ cups cherry tomatoes  2½ Tbsp. chopped or torn fresh basil leaves
2 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil, divided  2⅓ Tbsp. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
2 tsp. red wine vinegar  ½ cup (2 ounces) crumbled semisoft goat cheese

1. Preheat oven to 450°F.
2. Bring 4 quarts water to a boil in a large Dutch oven. Add 1 tablespoon salt and spaghetti to boiling water; cook 10 minutes or until spaghetti is al dente. Drain spaghetti in a colander over a bowl, reserving ⅓ cup cooking water. Return spaghetti to pan; set aside, and keep warm.
3. While spaghetti cooks, combine tomatoes, 1 tablespoon olive oil, vinegar, ⅜ teaspoon salt, and pepper on a jelly-roll pan, tossing well to coat. Bake tomato mixture at 450°F for 10 minutes or until tomatoes are soft and lightly charred in places.
4. Add tomatoes and any tomato juice to spaghetti in Dutch oven. Add 3 tablespoons reserved cooking water to jelly-roll pan, scraping pan to loosen browned bits; carefully pour water mixture and remaining 1 tablespoon oil into spaghetti mixture.
5. Place Dutch oven over medium heat. Add remaining reserved cooking water, 1 tablespoon at a time, until spaghetti mixture is moist, tossing frequently. Stir in basil and parsley. Sprinkle with cheese. Serve immediately.

Serves 4   Approximate Prep time: 32 minutes
Calories: 328   Fat: 10.8g  Saturated fat: 3.2g  Protein: 11g  Carbohydrate: 46.6g  Fiber: 3.2g

Source: Cooking Light 2010, with Let's Move!, the Partnership for a Healthier America

Lemon Rosemary Zucchini

1 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil  Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
1 medium yellow bell pepper, diced  1-3 tsp. freshly squeezed lemon juice, or to taste
2 tsp. finely minced fresh rosemary  2 cups chopped zucchini (2 medium)

1. In medium nonstick skillet, heat olive oil over medium heat. Add yellow pepper and rosemary and sauté 2 minutes. Add zucchini and salt and pepper, to taste.
2. Continue to sauté for another 4 to 5 minutes or until zucchini is just tender. Remove from heat and stir in lemon juice.

Makes 4 servings. Per serving: 46 calories, 3 g total fat (<1 g saturated fat), 4 g carbohydrate, 1 g protein, 1 g dietary fiber, 6 mg sodium
Source: The New American Plate: Meals for a Healthy Weight and a Healthy Life, American Institute for Cancer Research
Watermelon with Mint and Lime

6 cups seedless watermelon cubes  1 Tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil
2 Tbsp. chopped fresh mint  Juice of two limes

1. In a large bowl, toss the watermelon cubes with the mint, olive oil and lime juice.
2. Chill the salad for at least 1 hour before serving.

Note: If you prefer a sweeter salad, add ¼ cup of honey

Each serving: 70 calories; 1 gram protein; 13 grams carbohydrates; 1 gram fiber; 2 grams fat; 0 saturated fat; 0 cholesterol; 10 grams sugar; 2 mg. sodium.

Adapted from:  http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jul/15/food/la-fo-tablerecd-20100715

Creamy Basil and Chive Salad Dressing

1 cup basil leaves  1½ tsp. Worcestershire sauce
½ cup snipped chives  ¾ tsp. dry mustard
2 cloves garlic  1 cup mayonnaise
3½ Tbsp. red wine vinegar  ¾ cup sour cream

2. Store in glass container in refrigerator.

Adapted from: Fredricksburg Herb Farm

Fresh Peppermint Fudge Brownies

1 - 13x9 pan of your favorite brownies, baked and cooled  ½ Tbsp. finely chopped fresh mint leaves or 1 Tbsp. peppermint extract
2 cups confectioners’ sugar  3 drops of green food coloring (optional)
¼ cup unsalted butter  3 oz. unsweetened chocolate
2 Tbsp. milk  3 Tbsp. unsalted butter

1. Mix confectioners’ sugar, ¼ cup butter, milk, mint and food coloring in bowl until spreading consistency. Spread over cooled brownies. Place in freezer for 20 minutes.

Adapted from: Fredricksburg Herb Farm
Herbed Cherry Chicken Salad

3 cups cooked and chopped chicken breasts ½ cup orange rosemary mayonnaise (see below)
½ cup dried Bing cherries, coarsely chopped Salt and pepper, to taste
2 Tbsp. chopped fresh tarragon

Combine chicken and all other ingredients in a bowl. Refrigerate at least 2 hours and serve on crackers or bread.

Orange Rosemary Mayonnaise:

1 cup fresh orange juice 3 tsp. fresh rosemary
¼ cup mayonnaise Salt, to taste
¼ cup sour cream 2 drops orange extract (optional)

1. Cook orange juice in a saucepan on medium heat, swirling occasionally until juice is reduced to thick syrup, about 10 to 12 minutes.
2. Combine mayonnaise and sour cream in a bowl and add syrup, rosemary, salt, and orange extract (optional). Stir well. Cover and refrigerate at least 2 hours for flavors to blend.

Note: Variation on this recipe, substitute turkey for chicken and dried cranberries for dried cherries.

Source: Charlotte Herb Guild

Bubbly Baked Eggplant Parmesan

2 large eggplants 1 Tbsp. chopped fresh basil, or 1 tsp. dried garlic powder
¾ cup olive oil or enough nonstick olive oil 1 Tbsp. chopped fresh garlic, or 1 tsp. garlic powder
spray to coat eggplant ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese
2 cups homemade or store-bought tomato sauce 8 oz. low-fat mozzarella cheese, shredded

1. Peel eggplant (if desired) and cut crossways into 1/4-inch slices. Lightly fry on both sides in skillet using a nonstick pan and olive oil or nonstick spray until browned. Drain well on paper towels.
2. Place a layer of eggplant slices in a shallow baking dish; cover with some tomato sauce, a sprinkling of basil and garlic, a little Parmesan cheese and a little of the mozzarella cheese. Repeat layers until all ingredients are used, ending with mozzarella cheese. Bake, uncovered, at 400°F for 15 to 20 minutes until bubbly.

TIP: For a healthier version, season and bake the eggplant in the oven at 375° until lightly browned. Don’t let the eggplant get too mushy

Serves 6 One serving contains: Calories 264; Total Fat 19g; Cholesterol 33mg; Sodium 667mg; Total Carbohydrates 15g; Protein 11g.
Thyme-Rosemary Red Potato Crisps

1 lb. Red Bliss potatoes, scrubbed clean
Olive oil
1 tsp. finely minced rosemary
1 tsp. minced thyme
½ tsp. finely ground sea salt
¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper

1. Preheat oven to 400° F. Slice the potatoes ⅛-inch thick. Lightly coat two baking sheets with olive oil and arrange the potato slices in a single layer. Brush the potatoes with a thin layer of olive oil. Bake for 12 to 15 minutes, or until the potatoes are golden brown.
2. Meanwhile, combine the rosemary, thyme, salt and pepper in a small bowl. As soon as the potatoes come out of the oven, sprinkle the seasoning mix over the top. Transfer chips to a bowl and start snacking.

**Notes:** Uniform slicing is important for proper crisping for the entire batch
Reduce the fat by using vegetable spray on the bottom of the pan and top of potatoes
Experiment with dried as well as fresh herbs. Dried herbs and other spices can be added before baking.

Serves 4
Adapted from: www.ivillage.ca

Fresh Basil Pesto

2 cups fresh basil leaves, packed
½ cup extra virgin olive oil
½ cup pine nuts or walnuts
3 medium sized garlic cloves, minced
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

Optional: ½ cup freshly grated Parmesan-Reggiano or Romano cheese

1. Combine the basil in with the pine nuts, pulse a few times in a food processor. (If you are using walnuts instead of pine nuts and they are not already chopped, pulse them a few times first, before adding the basil.) Add the garlic, pulse a few times more.
2. Slowly add the olive oil in a constant stream while the food processor is on. Stop to scrape down the sides with a rubber spatula. Add the grated cheese and pulse again until blended. Add a pinch of salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste.

Makes 1 cup.
Source: http://simplyrecipes.com

Pesto Goat Cheese Spread

4 ounces soft mild goat cheese at room temperature
2 ounces cream cheese at room temperature
¼ cup pesto

Stir together all ingredients with salt and pepper to taste until smooth.
Source: Gourmet Magazine 2002
Brown Rice and Summer Vegetable Sauté

Olive oil  
1 peeled onion, diced  
½ cup chicken stock  
1 zucchini, diced

1 ear of corn kernels  
1 cup cooked brown rice  
1 sprig basil, leaves removed and chiffonade  
1 Tbsp. unsalted butter

1. Heat a medium high sauté pan over medium high heat. Once the pan is hot, add enough olive oil to lightly coat the pan. Add onions and sauté until browned, about 1-2 minutes.
2. Add the zucchini and corn to the pan sauté until browned, about 2 minutes.
3. Add chicken stock and bring to a simmer. Cook until the vegetables are just tender, about 3 to 5 minutes.
4. Fold in rice, tomatoes, basil and butter. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Lentil and Herb Salad

1 c. dried lentils  
½ c. finely chopped red onion  
2 Tbsp. finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley  
1 Tbsp. finely chopped fresh basil

½ tsp. salt  
⅛ tsp. freshly ground black pepper  
3 Tbsp. red wine vinegar  
2 Tbsp. olive oil

1. Place lentils in a large saucepan. Cover with water to 2 inches above lentils; bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer 45 minutes or until tender. Drain well.
2. Place lentils in a large bowl. Stir in onion and next 4 ingredients (through pepper). Add vinegar and oil; toss well. Serve at room temperature.

Source: Manatee County Extension

Notes: